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HATFIELD-MCCOY VENDETTA

History of a Bloody Feud Which Lasted Thirty Years and Cost a Score of Lives.

It Originated in a Quarrel Over a Razorback Hog, Led to Indiscriminate Murder, and Is Now Terminated by a Marriage.

Special Correspondence of the Sunday Journal.

PIKEVILLE, Ky., Feb. 18.—In a quiet little log church a few miles east of this place, surrounded by rugged peaks of the Kentucky mountains, a simple marriage ceremony was performed a few days since which united the McCoy and Hatfield families, that for thirty years have been engaged in one of the bloodiest feuds in the annals of the South. The cessation of hostilities comes after a lapse of time in which almost two generations of both families sacrificed their lives that their peculiar ideas of honor might be enforced. When Miss Hattie McCoy's and Frank Hatfield's extended hands met in the little old meeting-house on the banks of the river a few days ago a bloody chasm was closed that had engulfed fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters and innumerable more remote relatives on both sides. In the shadows of the poorly lighted church stood two score of persons to witness the ceremony. To every one the occasion possessed peculiar significance. They represented the survivors of the two families that for almost a quarter of a century have appeared to exist for the sole purpose of continuing the vendetta in which so many lives have been lost. Notwithstanding the fact that the members of both families had reasons for rejoicing at the conclusion of the terrible feud, they appeared to be oppressed by the solemnity of the occasion. Though they mingled together without reserve, the men shaking hands and conversing with each other, many of whom had never before met except with rifles, ready to slay on the slightest opportunity, phantoms of the past seemed to be passing in endless procession through the room as if the victims of the family hatred would protest against the consummation of the ceremony that would wipe out old lines that had been made sacred by such copious baptisms of blood. By mutual consent all the immediate representatives of the two families had assembled to cement the friendly ties proposed and make impossible repetitions of the dreadful scenes that have made this part of the State so notorious, and it was done.

The McCoy-Hatfield war, as it is commonly called in this section of the country, has been sufficiently extensive as to become part of the history of Kentucky and West Virginia, and a very interesting chapter it forms in the records of the two States. The history of the South presents many cases of family feuds in which loss of life has been considerable, and the determination and desperation of the participants in carrying to a fatal termination their family animosity is something remarkable, but the chronology of the country suggests no parallel to the ferocious warfare that has been conducted by the representatives of this Kentucky vendetta. It presents many peculiar features, and pathetic and ridiculous incidents have frequently been mingled together under circumstances that surround the whole affair with interest that is not provoked by the mere fact that several dozen desperately brave men have frequently been engaged in deadly combat until their ranks were reduced to almost nothing. Arising over a trifling affair, the feud finally embroiled two whole counties, and though the combats were of the fiercest kind and always more or less fatal to the representatives of the two families, no Governor of Kentucky or West Virginia has ever been known to honor a requisition for the alleged murderers in these mountain battles. The death list as a direct result of the feud comprises fifteen men, one boy and one young lady, while the indirect fatalities growing out of the vendetta can scarcely be computed. Of these only one death is actually imputed to the feud, and enough, it was the last tragedy in the annals of the war, and the victim was the son of the first man whose blood was shed in the interest of this peculiarly arranged plan of personal vengeance.

ORIGIN OF THE FEUD. The feud originated in 1851. The whole country was aflame with rumors of war. On the Kentucky side of the river, a branch of the Big Sandy, 200 miles from where that stream empties its waters into the Ohio, Randolph McCoy lived. He was one of the wealthiest farmers in that part of the State. He particularly prided himself on the number of "niggers" he owned. This was Ole Rand's idea of aristocracy. On the West Virginia side of the river, on Grapevine creek, Anderson Hatfield flourished. What Ole Rand's was to the portion of Kentucky, Bad Anse was to the head of the family was commonly known on account of his fighting proclivities, was to West Virginia's mountains. Ole Rand's children were about as numerous as the laws of nature would permit, and the household of Bad Anse was much the same. His particular. The prospect of freeing their negroes appeared sufficient in the eyes of both to warrant them in casting their fortunes with the Confederacy. Ole Rand didn't propose to have his slaves made as "good as white folks," and Bad Anse "lowed that if his 'niggers' were took he couldn't get along, nohow. They were a unit as to how their fortunes should be cast in the approaching struggle. They had always been fair neighbors, except on one or two occasions, when, made mellow by too much "moonshine," their big six-foot boys had come to blows. This, and an occasional dispute over the relative value of their human chattels, alone disturbed their neighborly equilibrium.

While they were awaiting developments and news from "down South" a small steamboat pushed its way into the headwaters of the Tug river to trade with the farmers. This was the only way communication could be established with the outside world. This relic of those days has not yet been disturbed. Ole Rand concluded that he would send some hogs down the river. The sides of the small boat almost touched the moss-grown banks of the stream. While the McCoy slaves were driving a number of the razor-backed species of hogs peculiar to that country aboard the boat, several Hatfield slaves came to the landing to witness the fun. One long-nosed hog refused to stay on the boat after being driven aboard, and leaped into the river and swam ashore. He found it most convenient to make a landing on the West Virginia bank, regardless of the fact that he belonged on the opposite side. That razor-backed hog was making history then, but the natives didn't realize it then as forcibly as a few years later.

It was lots of sport for the Hatfield darlings to watch the McCoy "niggers" chase the escaped porker, and they failed to catch him. The McCoy slaves told their master that the Hatfield negroes scored the hog off into a ravine, with the purpose of killing and eating it later. This angered Ole Rand, and he sent the Hatfields word that he wanted them to fetch that hog to his side of the river. Bad Anse did not take interest enough in the case to trouble himself over it. He "lowed" that if "Rand" wanted that hog he could come and get it. The head of the McCoy contingent sent Bad Anse word that he proposed to have that hog if he did have to come after it. This sounded to the practiced ear of Anse as if intended to convey a threat. He immediately sent Rand's word that if he thought he had boys enough on his place to take that porker from the West Virginia soil without the consent of the Hatfields, the quicker he tried it the sooner he would discover his mistake. Rand thought he had, and told his six boys that they could prepare for some fighting. About this time information was received of the declaration of hostilities in the South and personal affairs were forgotten in the great struggle.

Though five years had passed away before the McCoy and Hatfields returned to

their respective farms, the affair of the razor-backed hog had not been forgotten. A number of the boys on both sides did not come home with their fathers. They had been left on Southern battle fields. Of this the old men were proud. In fact they boasted of the circumstance. But they were not neighbors. Their interests in common died with the Southern Confederacy. It was not long until the boys began to have trouble with each other. When a Hatfield got on the Kentucky side of Tug river he was sure to have to fight several of the McCoy, and the situation was reversed when the McCoy were caught on the other side of the river. In this way a number of spirited duels occurred without loss of life. But their intentions were good. They had sworn never to be friends, and they thought the basis of the trouble was sufficient to require a blood atonement.

HAD ANSE CUT TO PIECES.

Matters continued in this manner to 1882. Bad Anse and Ole Rand were getting along in life, but had not forgotten the affair of the hog. Their children had assisted in keeping their memories clear on this subject. In the August election of this year Bad Anse and his five big sons came across the river to help carry the county election for a friend. It made no difference if they did not live in Kentucky. Talbot McCoy and his two brothers, Bad and Randolph, Jr., the youngest ten and the oldest not entitled to vote, got into a dispute with Anse and his boys. Anse allowed that he would carry the election. Ole Rand's boys said that he had better go look for that hog he stole from their ne "before de war. This was too much for Bad Anse, and he slapped the boy nearest him. The young McCoy were game, and at once drew their knives and began to use them vigorously on Anse. There were a dozen of the Hatfields and their friends present, but they thought it a good joke to stand back and see the old man whip three of the McCoy. They did not realize the seriousness of the situation until Bad Anse reeled from the center of the ring that had been formed under the big tree, where the votes were being polled, with blood gushing from a dozen wounds. He drew his revolver then and the young McCoy turned to run. But the crowd closed in and, each one suffering being bound, Bad Anse, the terror of the mountains and the political boss of the neighborhood, expired. Thirty-one cuts were found on the body, each one sufficient to cause death. The first victim of the feud had been literally cut to pieces.

When the Hatfields realized that Anse was dead, they at once prepared to avenge him. There was no question of the penalty—the McCoy boys had to die. The youth of the proposed victims did not appear to be considered, although once Hatfield mentioned regretfully that the sheriff ought not to have allowed both apple and corn moonshine to be sold near the poll, for the mixture always did have a bad effect on Bad Anse. Some one suggested that Ole Rand and his boys might happen along at any moment, and interfere with their plan of vengeance, and immediately the Hatfields started for West Virginia with their prisoners. The McCoy boys knew they were going to die, but they did not beg for mercy. Perhaps they knew it would be useless.

When Tug river was safely crossed, and sentries posted to give warning of the approach of the enemy, arrangements were deliberately made for executing the prisoners. Little Bad is said to have asked his older brother if he did not think the boys would come over and help them get away before they could be killed. This was when the little fellow saw Jone Hatfield putting double charges in a number of the men carried. Talbot said, "No, Bud, we won't see the folks any more for they are going to kill us, I guess, now." Though Bad's varied experience had enabled him to find the short space of ten years, he knew when his brother spoke that way he was not joking. His lips trembled, but not another word escaped him. The prisoners were tied to trees and their heads blown off with shotguns. The bodies were left hanging by the ropes with which they were tied. The next day the men came over with his sons and a few neighbors and removed the remains of his murdered boys. They were buried close to the McCoy homestead. This was to be the heart-broken mother for, as she said, she wanted to be close enough to the graves to keep the snow off the sod in the winter time and keep the weeds out of the wildflowers in the little family burying place in the spring. No immediate preparation was made for revenge by the Hatfields. They knew that it would be useless, as the Hatfields would be on the alert. But they then knew that the feud was to begin in earnest.

A WOMAN VICTIM.

The next victim, indirectly, of the feud was the young wife of Talbot, the oldest of the three victims. She died of a broken heart, at least that's what the neighbors say. She was only eighteen. For several months after the triple murder in which her young husband lost his life she complained that she could hear the roar of the guns that had blown the boys' heads off. One night she was found dead lying across her husband's grave. But it was no surprise, for the neighbors declare that they had expected it. Grandma McCoy then had one more grave to watch.

About this time an effort was made to secure requisitions for the Hatfields engaged in the murder of the boys. The Governor of Kentucky made the demand. The Hatfields anticipated the move. They knew what the result would be if taken into Kentucky on any pretense, so they prepared a number of petitions to West Virginia's Governor, explaining the situation and urging that the request be ignored. The petitions were distributed among the gang. They took their rifles, and in small squads, hunted through Logan county for signers. If a citizen had any doubts about the subject a sight of a cocked Winchester easily overcame them. In this manner the entire county petitioned the Governor to deny the requisitions. The Governor, appreciating the force that secured the numerous signatures, supposed the Hatfields to be much-abused people, and wrote Kentucky's Governor accordingly.

The fall following the killing of the three boys, John Logan and Sam Bird were found on the banks of Tug river shot through the heart. The Hatfields' bodies were found numerous shots had been heard in that direction. The rifles of the two victims showed that each had fired nine times. To the natives this indicated that a duel had taken place between the victims and some of the McCoy, but the facts were never made public property. But the Hatfields returned the compliment a few months later and gave Grandma McCoy another grave to tend by shooting the farmer McCoy as he was passing close to Tug river. This was the dividing line, and to approach it without great caution gave rise to unpleasant consequences.

Jeff McCoy was the next victim. He was Ole Rand's nephew. He was on the West Virginia side of the river and became separated from his companions. The Hatfields say he was sneaking around, trying to get a shot at some of them. The McCoy say he was hunting stock. He had his rifle with him. This was nothing unusual, as all members of the two families carried their arms constantly. Jeff missed the ford on the river and was in the act of swimming across when Cap Hatfield, Jone and "Uncle" Jim Vance appeared on the scene. They opened fire on Jeff. As each shot was fired Jeff increased his speed. The river at this point is fifty feet wide. He refused to drop his rifle, and this gave him but one hand to swim with. Though the bullets splashed water in his face Jeff reached the Kentucky shore without being touched. The Hatfield told this circumstance afterward as a great joke on "Uncle" Jim, who always swore that he could outshoot any man in those mountains. As Jeff sprang upon the bank a bullet pierced his brain. He fell dead upon his knees with his Winchester tightly grasped in his hand. In this position he was found the next day. This was three years after the death of Bad Anse.

THE MOST HORRIBLE FEATURE.

Then both sides rested on their arms until 1887, when the McCoy, under the leadership of Frank Phillips, a young fellow of the most desperate courage, concluded to make a raid into West Virginia and capture or kill some of the Hatfields. While this was prompted by desire for revenge, it was also induced by the large reward Kentucky had in the meantime offered for the body of any of the West Virginia out-